

Brothers and sisters in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen. The early Christian church believed that Christ would be returning in perhaps weeks, months or in a year or so at the very most. But He did not return and eventually people began to die and that raised a question about those who had died. Did their death mean that they didn't believe enough; had they failed in their faith? Or when Christ does return would they be given second place? Would they not be as important as those who are alive when He returned?

It is to this situation that the Apostle Paul writes his first letter to the church at Thessalonica, chapter four vs. 13 and 14. Paul writes, "But I do not want you to mourn as those who have no hope". Paul goes on to say that when Christ returns it is actually the dead who will rise first to meet Christ in the air and then we who are alive will meet Him in the sky. So Paul is really saying don't mourn for those who've died. They're not being left out, they are not being ignored. In fact they will be honored by Christ to be the first raised up. Paul would say that Jesus being raised from the dead is victorious and has defeated the powers of sin, death and the power of the devil. So there are no forces that Jesus cannot take on and defeat. We live in the hope.

Bible passages apply first to the situation in which they were spoken. Paul writes to those who are concerned about those who've died. That is the original application. But passages of the Bible have meanings for other situations that can be applied also. They can speak to other times in the life of people. Therefore, we have this passage that says not to mourn as those who have no hope that can be applied to many different situations. Think of a couple who have been dating and may be getting very serious. Then for some reason the one says to the other, I don't want to continue with you and the relationship ends. The other can feel shattered, destroyed, hopeless and goes into mourning. Maybe saying, I will never find another person to marry. It would be hard to hear, but Paul's words would be helpful, do not mourn as those who have no hope. In time, you will likely meet another person. Realty is that there are probably thousands of people with whom we could be happily married. It's a matter of finding them oftentimes.

These words of Paul can be applied to our situation here at First Lutheran Church in this interim period between Pastor Darrell's retirement and when the new pastor comes. There are two situations that his words of do not mourn as those who have no hope can apply. One is the way things were and second, anxiety about the future.

The first application is for mourning the way things were when Pastor Darrell was here. His ways were known, they became comfortable and you knew what to expect overall. The question now is whether that is going to change? Will some of those things stop? Last week I said that I would be open to people stopping in the office and that I would be in the office Monday Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday. A few people put some things together and said that means that there will be no pastor here at the church on Fridays. That didn't feel comfortable. That may have felt a little unsettling, thinking there should be a pastor here on Friday. That's the way it has been.

Paul's words of do not mourn as those who have no hope can be applied here. From my point of view I've worked with an associate pastor in which both of us worked Monday Tuesday Wednesday and Thursday. It went well. Friday is often the slow day at church and a number of churches close the office at noon.

And of course the pastors are available for emergencies or if somebody needs to come and talk to us and Friday is the only day, we are more than glad to do that.

Another way to look at this situation with hope is to realize that that my working Monday through Thursday is for the interim time. When the new pastor comes, they may want to work Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday during the week.

A second application to not mourn as those who have no hope can be to the anxiety about the future in this interim time. One can wonder if things will continue as they have. Do they need to continue as they have? I remember a scene from "All In The Family" when Edith is telling her daughter Gloria about how she learned to make eggs just the way Archie's mother made them. When Archie tasted them for the very first time he said, "This is just the way my mother made them." Edith asked him if he liked them, then. No, he said, I always hated the way my mother made eggs.

There can be mourning because we are afraid that things won't change and we want them to change. There was a German psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, a Jew, who along with his wife were swept up in the holocaust. As Frankl lived in the barracks he began to notice that two men, seemingly of the same age, same strength, same health would have two different results. One would shrivel away and the other would manage to exist. He began to wonder why so we began to talk to these people in the barracks and found out that the people who seem to shrivel up, found no reason no hope, to go on and they let go of life.

The ones who lived seemed to have found some meaning there, some reason to keep on living, awful as it was. Frankl told his wife are they were separated when they got to the concentration camps, "Find a way to survive no matter what you have to do." They were able to hang on to a hope that they would one day get out of what was happening.

I remember in fourth grade playing softball with the fifth graders. They were bigger and they kept hitting it past us fourth graders in the field. We would have to run after the ball again and again. I wondered, what's the purpose of doing this? I had little hope, day after day.

The writer of the 121st Psalm is a person going on a journey and she or he looks up into the hills and says these words, "I lift my eyes up onto the hills, from where is my help to come?" In the hills there were deep gorges, narrow paths. There were wild animals that could be a danger. And there were also bandits, robbers that may have been the most dangerous.

The answer comes back, "The Lord the creator of heaven and earth will be with you. The Lord will protect you from the sun and the moon, the Lord will hold and keep your feet stable, you are not alone."

It is possible for us to look at situations and mourn because mourning, crying, weeping are ways to deal with loss or anxiety. We can also become depressed or have some despair. This is natural. Depressing is not necessarily bad. A body depresses as a way of healing or protecting itself and going through a time of depression time is not necessarily bad. When it extends and gets in the way of too much life, then it is time to move out of it or get help to move out of it.

Jesus has another name and that is Emmanuel, which means, God with us. In the midst of hard times we can have hope because Jesus is with us, giving us His help and support. Jesus has faced death and been resurrected. He has risen as the Lord over all. He has defeated the powers of sin, death and the devil. For that reason, we do not mourn as those who have no hope. We have Jesus!

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He left His disciples on a mountaintop outside of Jerusalem. I have been caught by the absence of any mention of the disciples mourning His departure; that they wouldn't see Him again walking the roads of Judah and Galilee. Maybe they did have a time of mourning and even some depression. At the same time Jesus told them that they were to be His witnesses in Jerusalem in Judea and Samaria and onto the ends of the earth. They were to tell the good news of Jesus. And they did.

The mission of First Lutheran Church here is to embrace all with a love of God involving them in mission and ministry. In this interim time we can sorrow, we can mourn, we can be anxious about the future; we can be restless for the future. We can be anxious to get something moving, some new ideas forming. To mourn and be anxious is normal. We don't do it as those who have no hope. We do it in light of Jesus who is with us, guiding us, supporting us, encouraging us and telling us that He'll be with us as we move into the future and that helps make all the difference. Amen